MEMORANDUM

January 24, 2008

TO: Education Committee

FROM: Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Senior Legislative Analyst *EBT*
            Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: **Worksession on OLO Report 2008-2:** *Defining and Describing Montgomery County Public Schools' Progress in Closing the Achievement Gap*

On January 28, the Education Committees will hold a worksession on Office of Legislative Oversight Report 2008-2, which the Council received and released on January 22, 2008. Councilmembers are asked to bring their copies of this report to the worksession.

Extra copies of the full report are available in LIS. This report is also accessible on-line at www.montgomertcountymd.gov/olo.

Staff recommends the following worksession agenda:

- Overview of the report by OLO staff;
- Comments from MCPS representatives; and
- Committee worksession on issues identified for discussion.

The following MCPS personnel will attend the Education Committee worksession:

- Mr. Larry A. Bowers, Chief Operating Officer;
- Dr. Frieda Lacey, Deputy Superintendent of Schools; and
- Ms. Jody Leleck, Chief Academic Officer.

The Executive Summary of OLO's report is attached on © 1. Written comments received from the Chief Operating Officer on the final draft of the Findings and Recommendations chapters of the report are attached on © 5.

1. Project Background, Purpose and Methodology

Montgomery County Public Schools' has focused on narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status for a number of years. The "achievement gap" refers to the national phenomenon of disparities in achievement between high- and low-performing student groups. On most measures, White, Asian, and higher-income students, as well as students ineligible for special services such as ESOL perform better on average than Blacks, Latinos, lower-income students, and students eligible for special services. Much of the public funds appropriated by the Council to MCPS annually are targeted toward closing the achievement gap to enable MCPS to "ensure success for every student."

This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) Report: explains the different ways the term "achievement gap" is defined and used by MCPS; describes the federal, state and local policy framework aimed at narrowing the achievement gap; and summarizes student performance data on the magnitude and natures of the achievement gap in the County. The Council requested this project to further the Council's understanding of the achievement gap in MCPS and to enhance the Council's review and oversight of MCPS' budget requests targeted at closing the gap.

OLO worked with MCPS staff to develop a set of 43 student performance measures across 15 categories to reflect the current magnitude of the achievement gap and MCPS' progress in narrowing the gap. Exhibit 3-1 on © 10-11 lists the measures reviewed by OLO.

2. Project Findings

In sum, the data indicate that MCPS has: made progress in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status on standardized measures of grade-level performance; achieved mixed progress in narrowing the gap on many above grade-level measures and gifted identification; and lost ground on several non-standardized measures of grade-level performance (e.g., suspension rates) and disability classification.

OLO's report contains nine findings in three areas: legal and policy framework, the current magnitude of the MCPS achievement gap, and MCPS' progress in closing the achievement gap. A summary of all findings is attached on © 2- 3; the full chapter of findings is attached, beginning at © 12.

3. Recommended Discussion Issues

OLO recommends the Education Committee schedule worksessions with MCPS representatives to discuss: the achievement gap data reviewed in this report; MCPS' tracking of progress in narrowing the achievement gap; and the funding of MCPS' initiatives aimed at closing the achievement gap.

As Councilmembers and MCPS officials have already acknowledged, any serious effort to close the achievement gap is a long term, broad-based commitment. It requires a working partnership among policy makers, elected officials, and administrators, and an ongoing public dialogue to examine complex data and address difficult policy and funding choices.

The data reviewed throughout this report demonstrate that measuring and tracking the MCPS' achievement gap over time is especially complex. Based on these findings, OLO recommends four specific issues for Council discussion with MCPS representatives. The issues relate to the magnitude of the MCPS achievement gap, MCPS' tracking of progress in narrowing the achievement gap, and future Council funding decisions of initiatives aimed at closing the achievement gap.

OLO recommends the Council schedule Education Committee worksessions with MCPS to consider the specific discussion issues outlined below.

Issue (a): Discuss with MCPS how the school system establishes its funding priorities for closing the achievement gap and how MCPS' FY09 budget request reflects these priorities.

Our Call to Action, the school system's strategic plan, articulates dozens of goals focused on narrowing the achievement gap. Examples of MCPS' specific goals include:

- Narrowing the gap in graduation rates,
- Improving performance on state assessments and SAT participation, and
- Eliminating disproportionate representation in special education, suspensions, and enrollment in AP and honors courses.

As evidenced in this report, MCPS has made notable progress and narrowed the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status in many areas; and achieved mixed progress in a number of other areas. However, the data also indicate that the achievement gap has widened for some other indicators of student performance such as suspension and dropout rates.

Because efforts to close the achievement gap are at risk of being overwhelmed by too many goals, OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS how the school system establishes its funding priorities for narrowing the achievement gap. And related to this, the Council should discuss with MCPS how the school system's FY09 budget request reflects MCPS' priorities.

As part of this discussion, OLO recommends the Council consider asking MCPS to identify its top five priority goals related to narrowing the achievement gap within the next two to five years. OLO further recommends the Council discuss with MCPS the process MCPS uses to identify performance measures to track progress for the different goals, and to indicate which measures relate to particular priorities.

The purpose of this discussion is to provide the Council with a better understanding of what MCPS' achievement gap priorities are, and give the Council more information on how MCPS officials see Council funding of specific initiatives aligning with these priorities.

Related to this issue, the Chief Operating Officer's letter states the following:

"We believe that it is the responsibility of the Board of Education to establish the school system's priorities and the number of priorities. MCPS would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with the Montgomery County Council how the school system's priorities are established and the relationship between these priorities and funding requests."

Issue (b): Discuss with MCPS the feasibility of performing an analysis to determine whether County investments in specific initiatives, e.g., in class size reduction, early childhood education, and additional support to high-poverty schools, have resulted in a narrowing of the MCPS achievement gap.

Over the past six years, the Council has approved MCPS budgets that include significant investments to enhance instructional support through class size reduction, early childhood education via the Early Success initiative, and target additional resources to high poverty elementary schools. At the secondary level, the County has invested in other MCPS initiatives, such as high school reform, designed to improve student achievement.

OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS the feasibility of generating performance data for cohorts of students who have benefited from these investments. An analysis of these data by subgroup that controls for other predictors of student performance could help to determine whether these investments had a differential impact on student performance (i.e., by race, ethnicity, and/or service group), and examine whether these investments contributed to MCPS' progress in closing the achievement gap.

The Council indicated an interest in learning more about the achievement gap in order to make more informed decisions about funding new MCPS initiatives to close the gap. Consistent with this interest, it would be useful to know whether and how the MCPS initiatives the Council has already funded contributed to closing the gap.

Issue (c): Discuss with MCPS the relationship between initiatives to close the gap on grade-level performance compared to initiatives that focus on closing the gap on above grade-level performance.

MCPS' strategic plan articulates a commitment to ensuring that all students meet rigorous standards for achievement that enable success after high school. MCPS has raised the bar for all students and views progress in advanced course taking and performance on standardized assessments of advanced skills such as the SAT, AP and IB as better benchmarks of student success than grade-level measures such as state assessments.

The data reviewed in this report demonstrate that MCPS has achieved significant progress in narrowing the gap on standardized measures of grade-level performance, as evident in pass rates on early reading benchmarks, the Maryland State Assessments (MSAs), and High School Assessments (HSAs). However, the data also show that considerable gaps remain among non-standardized measures of grade-level performance, such as dropout and suspension rates. Additionally, the data indicate that, in general, MCPS has achieved greater progress in narrowing the gap on grade-level measures than on above grade-level measures.

OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS the relationship between and its prioritization of initiatives designed to close the achievement gap on grade-level performance compared to initiatives that focus on closing the gap on above-grade-level performance. For example, OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS whether the school system can reach its goal of narrowing the gap in above grade-level measures without first making investments to close the gaps still evident by race, ethnicity, and service group status for grade-level measures.

Issue (d): Ask MCPS to outline the school system's vision for continued progress in closing the achievement gap based on current trends and investments.

MCPS has made significant investments in closing the achievement gaps associated with race, ethnicity, and service group status. The rankings of performance data by progress in narrowing the achievement gap demonstrate that MCPS has made significant progress in narrowing the grade-level gap on standardized measures (e.g., MSA and HSA) by race, ethnicity, and service group. At the same time, some gaps have widened, particularly for suspension rates and dropout and graduation rates by race and ethnicity, and for some measures of above grade-level performance (e.g., advanced math course enrollment in Grade 6).

The analysis of trend performance data also demonstrates that MCPS has achieved greater progress in narrowing the achievement gap between White and Latino students than between White and Black students, and that greater progress has also been achieved in improving the performance of English language learners relative to all students than among students with disabilities and students receiving free and reduced price meals.

OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS the progress the school system anticipates in the short- and long-term on the achievement gap based on student performance trends to date and current investments for future progress. In particular, OLO recommends the Council ask MCPS to outline the school system's vision for continued progress on priority goals related to closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status.

4. Recommended Next Steps

As a next step, OLO recommends the Council compile a list of follow-up questions for MCPS to address in the coming year.

When this OLO project was initially assigned, the Council indicated that the project might proceed in two phases. Suggestions for a second phase included comparing the MCPS achievement gap data to other jurisdictions and/or summarizing the literature on best practices for closing the achievement gap.

For the first phase of this project, OLO's data review provides the Council with more detailed information on the complexity of MCPS' achievement gap. As a second phase, OLO recommends the Council compile a list of follow-up questions for MCPS to address in the coming year. Some of these questions might extend to obtaining a comparative perspective, based on data available from other school systems.

If the Council is interested in comparative data, OLO cautions the Council that any comparative analysis across school systems would be a considerable undertaking.

Although the No Child Left Behind Act established national requirements for reporting disaggregated data that describes the achievement gap, it does not mandate a consistent set of performance measures. Instead, states are free to establish their own criteria, assessments, and measures. Given these differences, it may prove difficult to acquire valid comparable data. The time and effort spent in developing or ensuring the comparability of the data might outweigh the value the Council would gain from understanding how MCPS' achievement gap compares to the gaps that peer school systems are facing.

The original purpose of this project was to enable the Council to engage in a more informed dialogue with MCPS regarding its efforts to close the achievement gap, the efficacy of those efforts, and the costs of different approaches aimed at narrowing the gap. As the Council and MCPS address the discussion issues identified earlier, OLO recommends the Council develop a list of follow-up questions for MCPS. Depending on the direction of the Council's interest in pursuing issues related to the achievement gap, OLO stands ready to assist the Council to review and analyze MCPS responses in whatever ways the Council decides is most appropriate.

ATTACHMENTS	BEGINS AT:
Executive Summary of OLO Report 2008-2	© 1
Comments from the Chief Operating Officer, January 16, 2008	© 5
Chapter I: Authority, Scope, and Organization	© 7
Exhibit 3-1: List of Selected Measures to Assess the Dimensions of the Achievement Gap in MCPS	© 10
Chapter VI: Summary of Findings	© 12

THE ASSIGNMENT

The "achievement gap" refers to disparities in achievement between high- and low-performing student groups. On most measures of performance, White, Asian, and high-income students demonstrate higher levels of achievement than Black, Latino, and low-income students. Similarly, students who do not receive special education or English as a second language services typically perform better than students who do receive these services.

This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) project: explains the different ways the term "achievement gap" is defined and used by Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS); describes the federal, state, and local policy framework aimed at narrowing the achievement gap; and summarizes student performance data on the magnitude and nature of the achievement gap in the County. The Council requested this project to further the Council's understanding of the achievement gap in MCPS and to enhance the Council's review and oversight of MCPS' budget requests targeted at closing the achievement gap.

The achievement gaps experienced by MCPS are a local reflection of a larger national challenge. Closing the achievement gap reflects a belief among policymakers that public schools can close or significantly narrow the achievement gap. School systems face challenges in their efforts to close the achievement gap. At minimum, these challenges include how to:

- Close the achievement gap without limiting what top students learn;
- Close the achievement gap without setting the bar so low that everyone can pass it;
- Close the achievement gap without pushing out students most at risk of failure;
- Reflect on and address the role of schools in contributing to the achievement gap; and
- Address culturally sensitive issues without reinforcing stereotypes that some students can learn while others cannot.

METHODOLOGY

OLO worked with MCPS staff to develop a set of 43 student performance measures across 15 categories that reflect the current magnitude of the achievement gap and MCPS' progress in narrowing the gap. The report presents findings based on two different analytical approaches.

First, OLO compared the performance results of high-performing and low-performing student groups across three types of measures: (1) measures of grade-level performance; (2) measures of above grade-level performance; and (3) measures of gifted and disability identification. Summary data are presented on the current magnitude of MCPS' achievement gaps across grade-level, above grade-level, and identification measures. Summary data are also presented to describe the progress MCPS has made in narrowing achievement gaps over a three- to seven-year period among cohorts of student subgroups by grade level, e.g., 3rd graders in 2003 compared to 3rd graders in 2007.

Second, OLO developed performance ratios to describe the progress of subgroups relative to one another. For example if 90% of White students reached a benchmark met by 60% of Black students, then Black students were two-thirds as likely as White students to reach this benchmark. OLO calculated and ranked performance ratios to identify those measures where gaps in performance are minimal and those measures where wide gaps in performance still exist. OLO also examined changes in these ratios over time to identify measures where MCPS made the greatest gains in closing the achievement gap and measures where MCPS lost ground.

The data indicate that MCPS has: made progress in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status on standardized measures of grade-level performance; achieved mixed progress in narrowing the gap on many above grade-level measures and gifted identification; and lost ground on several non-standardized measures of grade level performance (e.g., suspension rates) and disability identification.

OLO's major findings are summarized below in three categories: legal and policy framework, the current magnitude of the MCPS achievement gap, and MCPS' progress in closing the achievement gap.

<u>Legal and Policy Framework</u>

1. Federal and State laws contain requirements for closing the achievement gap. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandates that states, districts, and schools ensure that all students demonstrate proficiency in state reading and mathematics standards by the end of the 2013-14 school year. Maryland's Bridge to Excellence Act of 2002 codified the goals of NCLB into state law, and the State Board of Education has required that all students must pass High School Assessments (HSAs) or alternate requirements in order to graduate.

2. MCPS' strategic plan and annual reports reflect a commitment to closing the achievement gap. While federal and state laws to close the achievement gap require all students meet grade-level expectations, MCPS' goals and milestones often exceed these mandates because they address both at grade and above grade-level expectations for student performance. MCPS' commitment to narrowing the gap in above grade-level measures is described in its strategic plan, *Our Call to Action,* and MCPS' annual report of this plan tracks MCPS' progress in narrowing the gap on both grade-level and above grade-level performance goals.

<u>Current Magnitude of the MCPS Achievement Gap</u>

3. The magnitude of MCPS' current achievement gap varies widely. The current magnitude of the achievement gap varies widely among the 43 measures of performance reviewed. For example, in 2007, 82% or more of every subgroup met the Kindergarten Spring Reading Benchmark and 80% or more of every senior subgroup earned their high school diplomas. In comparison, suspension, disability identification, and drop-out rates evidence notable differences between high- and low-performing student groups. For example, in 2007, 3% of White students were suspended from secondary school compared to 10% of Latino students and 15% of Black students.

4. Standardized assessments show smaller achievement gaps for measures of elementary grade-level performance compared to secondary grade-level performance. The achievement gaps by race and ethnicity on standardized assessments of grade-level skills in the elementary grades were smaller than comparable assessments in the secondary grades. For example, in 2007, compared to White students, Black students were 78% as likely to pass the Grade 3 MSA in math; 68% as likely to pass the Grade 8 MSA in reading, and 51% as likely to pass the Grade 8 MSA in math.

5. The achievement gaps for most above grade measures are wider than the gaps for grade-level measures. On average, the achievement gaps by subgroup for measures of above grade-level performance are wider than the gaps for grade-level performance. For example, in 2006 and 2007, Whites were more than twice as likely as Blacks and Latinos to: enroll in Advanced Math in Grades 5 and 6; complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 8; and earn PSAT verbal, math and reading scores that demonstrate honors/AP potential. Similarly, all students were more than twice as likely to meet these benchmarks as English language learners, students with disabilities, and students receiving free and reduced priced meals (FARMs).

6. MCPS' disability and gifted identification data evidence significant gaps by race and ethnicity. Data from 2006 demonstrate that Blacks were more than twice as likely as Whites to be identified as having mental retardation or an emotional disturbance, and that both Blacks and Latinos were 77-79% more likely than Whites to be identified as having a learning disability. Further, Grade 2 Global Screening data from 2007 show that 50% of White students were identified as gifted compared to only 22% of Blacks and Latinos.

MCPS Progress in Narrowing the Achievement Gap

7. Trend data show that MCPS made progress in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status for nine measures, achieved mixed progress for seven measures, and lost ground in closing the gap for four measures. Depending on data availability, the trend data reviewed reflected between three and seven years of performance.

A. Measures on which MCPS made progress in closing the achievement gap:

- ☐ Reading Benchmarks in Kindergarten and Grade 1
- ☐ TerraNova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in Grade 2
- ☐ Maryland State Assessments in Grades 3, 5 and 8
- ☐ Maryland High School Assessments in Algebra, English, Biology and Government
- ☐ Participation on the Preliminary SAT and SAT
- ☐ Qualifying Advanced Placement exam scores of 3 or higher
- ☐ Algebra I completion by the end of Grade 9
- ☐ Geometry completion by the end of Grade 10
- ☐ Least Restrictive Environment A placements for special education

B. Measures on which MCPS achieved mixed progress in closing the achievement gap:

- ☐ School Readiness in Kindergarten
- ☐ Algebra I completion by the end of Grade 8
- ☐ Advanced Placement (AP) Participation among Graduates
- ☐ PSAT Performance demonstrative of AP/honors potential
- ☐ Gifted Identification
- ☐ Graduation rates among seniors
- ☐ Dropout rates among high school students

C. Measures on which MCPS lost ground in closing the achievement gap on:

- ☐ Advanced math course enrollment in Grade 6
- ☐ SAT Performance (i.e., combined SAT math and verbal scores of 1,100 or more among seniors)
- ☐ Special education identification
- ☐ Student suspensions

8. MCPS made greater progress narrowing the achievement gap between White and Latino students than between White and Black Students. MCPS improved the performance of Latino students relative to their White peers by 20% or more on 12 measures over a three- to seven-year time frame. In comparison, MCPS improved the performance of Black students relative to White students by 20% or more for only six measures. The exceptions to this pattern include dropout rates and learning disability rates where Latinos lost more ground than Blacks compared to their White peers.

9. MCPS made greater progress in narrowing the achievement gap associated with English language proficiency, compared to closing the gaps associated with special education and the receipt of free and reduced meals (FARMs). MCPS improved the performance of English language learners relative to their peers and the performance of students receiving FARMs relative to their peers by 20% or more on 13 measures of performance. The range of MCPS progress among these measures for students receiving FARMs, however, was smaller than that achieved among English language learners. In comparison, MCPS improved the performance of students with disabilities relative to their peers by 20% or more for ten measures.

The Council requested this OLO report to further the Council's understanding of the achievement gap in MCPS and to enhance the Council's oversight of MCPS budget requests targeted at closing the achievement gap. OLO's recommended discussion issues and next steps for Council action follow.

Recommendation #1: **OLO recommends the Council schedule Education Committee worksessions with MCPS representatives to discuss: the achievement gap data reviewed in this report; MCPS' tracking of progress in narrowing the achievement gap; and the funding of MCPS' initiatives aimed at closing the achievement gap.**

Issue (a): Discuss how the school system establishes its funding priorities for closing the achievement gap and how MCPS' FY09 budget request reflects these priorities. As part of this discussion, OLO recommends the Council consider asking MCPS to identify its top five priorities for closing the achievement gap within the next two to five years. The purpose of this discussion would provide the Council with a better understanding of what MCPS' achievement gap priorities are, and give the Council more information on how MCPS officials see Council funding of specific initiatives aligning with these priorities.

Issue (b): Discuss the feasibility of performing an analysis to determine whether investments in specific MCPS initiatives, e.g., class size reduction, early childhood education, and additional support to high-poverty schools, have narrowed the achievement gap. OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS the feasibility of generating performance data for cohorts of students who have benefited from these initiatives. An analysis of these data by subgroup could help to determine whether these investments had a differential impact on student performance (i.e., by race, ethnicity, and/or service group) and whether these investment contributed to MCPS' progress in closing the achievement gap.

Issue (c): Discuss the relationship between initiatives to close the gap on grade-level performance compared to initiatives designed to close the gap on above grade-level performance. OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS whether the school system can reach its goal of narrowing the gap in above grade-level performance without first closing the gaps in grade-level performance, or whether these goals can be pursued simultaneously.

Issue (d): Ask MCPS to outline the school system's vision for continued progress in closing the achievement gap based on current trends and investments. OLO recommends the Council discuss with MCPS the progress the school system anticipates in the short and long term on the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group based on current initiatives and student performance trends to date.

Recommendation #2: **As the next step, OLO recommends the Council compile a list of follow-up questions for MCPS to address in the coming year.**

For the first phase of this project, OLO's data review provides the Council with more detailed information on the magnitude and nature of MCPS' achievement gap. As a second phase, OLO recommends the Council compile a list of follow-up questions for MCPS to address in the coming year.

When this project was initially assigned, the Council indicated interest in obtaining comparative data from other school systems. OLO cautions the Council that any comparative analysis across school systems would be a considerable undertaking. While federal legislation establishes national requirements for school systems to report data, it does not mandate a consistent set of performance measures. The time and effort needed to ensure the comparability of data across districts might outweigh the value the Council would gain from understanding how MCPS' achievement gap compares to the gaps that peer school systems are facing.

As the Council and MCPS address the discussion issues identified above, OLO stands ready to assist the Council to review and analyze MCPS responses in whatever ways the Council decides is most appropriate.

For a complete copy of OLO-Report 2008-2, go to: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo

January 16, 2008

Ms. Karen Orlansky, Director
Dr. Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Senior Legislative Analyst
Office of Legislative Oversight
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Ms. Orlansky and Dr. Bonner-Tompkins:

Thank you for providing the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff with the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Findings and Recommendations Chapters for the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) Report 2008-2, *Defining and Describing Montgomery County Public Schools' Progress in Closing the Achievement Gap.* MCPS appreciates the strong collaborative process that was used throughout the development and review of this report. This OLO report will be helpful in furthering the Montgomery County Council's understanding of the achievement gap in MCPS and our review and oversight of future MCPS budget requests targeted at closing the achievement gap.

It is evident that much of the feedback provided by MCPS throughout the development of the report was carefully considered and incorporated. In our final review, the following comments are offered:

- Distinctions need to be made between percent change and percentage-point change. Using percent change calculations to measure achievement gaps can be misleading when the percentages are very small. For example, (Page 65) the percent change in the suspension gap for Limited English Proficiency students of 1400% could occur even if the percentage-point change were only one point (e.g., 0.1% to 1.5%). Thus, what mathematically is a very large percentage change actually represents a small number of students. Other examples of this phenomenon occur in the gap for special education identification and drop out rates.

- We believe that it is the responsibility of the Board of Education to establish the school system's priorities and the number of priorities. MCPS would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with the Montgomery County Council how the school system's priorities are established and the relationship between these priorities and funding requests.

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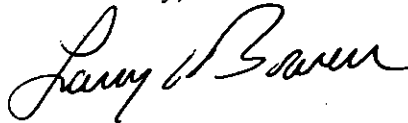
Thank you again for the opportunity to review the draft findings and recommendations. I believe the collaborative work between MCPS and OLO will result in an excellent report that will support the work of the school system and the County Council.

Sincerely,

Larry A. Bowers
Chief Operating Officer

LAB:sz

Copy to:
Dr. Weast
Dr. Lacey
Ms. Leleck

Chapter I: Authority, Scope, and Organization

A. Authority

Council Resolution 16-260, *FY 2008 Work Program for Office of Legislative Oversight*, adopted July 24, 2007.

B. Scope, Purpose, and Methodology

Scope and Purpose. During Council budget worksessions in recent years, Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) cited "closing the achievement gap" as a rationale for funding a number of initiatives. The Council assigned the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) this project to further the Council's understanding of achievement gap issues in general, and to enhance the Council's review of MCPS budget requests targeted at closing the achievement gap.

The term "achievement gap" refers to disparities in educational performance among different student groups. Studies of the achievement gap typically report differences between high-performing subgroups (e.g., Whites, Asians, and high-income students) and low-performing subgroups (e.g., Blacks, Latinos, and low-income students). Efforts to monitor the achievement gap generally track one or more measures of educational performance (e.g., standardized test scores, graduation rates) among students by race, ethnicity and income. Increasingly, achievement gap students also compare differences in student performance by disability status and English language proficiency.

To facilitate and inform future Council worksessions on this critical issue, this project:

- Describes how the term achievement gap is defined and used;

- Compiles information on Federal, State, and local policies and regulations for closing the achievement gap; and

- Summarizes relevant data that document the magnitude and nature of the achievement gaps in Montgomery County.

When assigning this project, the Council indicated that neither the Education Committee nor the Council intends to begin advising the Board of Education, or to recommend the adoption of specific practices for closing the achievement gap. At the time this project was assigned, the Council also expressed an interest in a possible follow-up report that compares MCPS achievement gap data to other jurisdictions and/or summarize the literature on best practices for closing the achievement gap.

Methodology: This project was conducted in the Fall of 2007 by OLO Senior Legislative Analyst Elaine Bonner-Tompkins with assistance from Sue Richards, Jennifer Renkema, Richard Romer, Sarah Downie, and Teri Busch. To prepare this report, OLO conducted a combination of research, document reviews, and interviews. Specifically, OLO:

- Reviewed Federal and State laws and regulations and MCPS' strategic goals aimed at closing the achievement gap;

- Identified existing data from MCPS and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) that examines trends in student performance by subgroup and progress in closing the achievement gap; and

- Consulted with key MCPS staff including the Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy Superintendent of Schools, the Chief Academic Officer, and Acting Director of the Department of Shared Accountability to identify the measures of student performance that should be reviewed in this report and to collect relevant data.

C. Organization of Report

Chapter II, Background, describes the achievement gap, Federal and State laws aimed at closing the gap, and the components of MCPS' strategic plan, *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence,* that articulate the achievement gaps that MCPS strives to narrow.

Chapter III, Research Methods, describes the selection and measures of student performance reviewed in this report and how the achievement gap is measured.

Chapter IV, Analysis of Current Data on Student Performance and Achievement Gaps, describes current student performance and gaps in achievement across 43 measures of grade-level performance, above grade-level performance, and gifted and special education by race, ethnicity, and service group status.

Chapter V, Analysis of Trend Data on Student Performance and Achievement Gaps, describes trends in student performance and MCPS' progress in narrowing the achievement gap for 37 measures of student performance with available data by race and ethnicity, and 32 measures with available data by service group status.

Chapter VI, Summary of Findings, describes OLO's findings in three areas: legal and policy framework, the current magnitude of the achievement gap, and MCPS' progress closing the achievement gap.

Chapter VII, Recommended Discussion Issues and Next Steps, outlines OLO's suggestions for Council discussion and recommendations for next steps.

The **Appendices** includes additional data and analysis for the 15 categories of student performance synthesized in this report and a bibliography.

D. Acknowledgements

OLO received a high level of cooperation from everyone involved in this study. OLO thanks the following MCPS staff who met and responded to our data requests during this study period and offered invaluable feedback:

- Mr. Larry Bowers, Chief Operating Officer;
- Dr. Frieda Lacey, Deputy Superintendent of Schools;
- Ms. Jody Leleck, Chief Academic Officer;
- Dr. Carey Wright, Associate Superintendent, Special Education and Student Services;
- Dr. Michael Perich, Acting Director, Department of Shared Accountability;
- Ms. Robin Confino, Executive Director, Office of the Chief Operating Officer;
- Dr. Clare Von Secker, Supervisor of Applied Research, Department of Shared Accountability;
- Ms. E. Grace Chesney, Supervisor of Testing Unit, Department of Shared Accountability;
- Ms. Heather Wilson, Research and Data Analyst, Department of Special Education Operations; and
- Ms. Jody Silvio, Executive Assistant to Deputy Superintendent of Schools.

E. Key Terms and Definitions

OLO used the following terminology in this report to describe subgroups of students by race, ethnicity and service group status.

- **White** refers to students who refer to themselves as White/Non-Hispanic or Caucasian. To be consistent with other groups, White is capitalized throughout the report.

- **Asian** refers to students who refer to themselves as Asian or Asian American.

- **Black** refers to students who refer to themselves as Black/ Non-Hispanic or African American. To be consistent with other groups, Black is capitalized throughout the report.

- **Latino** refers to students who refer to themselves as either Latino or Hispanic. Latino students can be of any race (e.g., White, Black, or Asian).

- **Students with disabilities** refer to students with individualized education plans who are eligible for special education and related services. This term is analogous to students served in special education and students eligible for special education services.

- **English language learners** refer to students with limited English proficiency. Many, but not all these students are eligible for English as a Second Language (ESOL). English language learners and students with limited English proficiency refer to students receiving ESOL and those who have exited these services within the last two years.

- **Students receiving free and reduced price meals** (FARMs) refer to students who are currently receiving free and reduced price meals rather than low-income students overall. This category of students is analogous to MCPS' description of students who participate in the Free and Reduced Price Meals System (FARMs).

- **Students receiving special services** refer collectively to students who are eligible to receive special education or FARMs, and to English language learners. Together, these students make up the service group/subgroup.

- **Students ineligible for special services** refer to students who are English proficient and ineligible for special education or FARMs. Together, these students comprise the non-service group/subgroup.

- **Identification measures that** describe rates of identification for gifted and special education. Additionally, this category includes prevalence rates by race and ethnicity for learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, mental retardation, and inclusive instructional placements for students with disabilities.

A total of 15 categories of student performance were identified for analysis in this report. Because some of the categories of student performance identified, such as the Maryland School Assessment, include multiple measures of performance by grade-level (e.g., Grades 3, 5, and 8) and/or by subject matter (e.g., reading and math), the 15 categories included 43 separate measures of student performance.

Exhibit 3-1 displays the 15 categories of performance included in OLO's dataset and references the availability of current and trend data within this report.

Exhibit 3-1: List of Selected Measures to
Assess the Dimensions of the Achievement Gap in MCPS

Grade-Levels	Measures of Student Performance by Category (15)	Cohort or Data Points	Measures of Achievement Gaps by Race and Ethnicity		Measures of Achievement Gaps by Service Group	
			Current	Trends	Current	Trends
Standardized Grade-Level Measures						
Pre-K to Grade 8	School Readiness (1)	Kindergarten	√	√	√	√
	Spring Reading Benchmarks (2)	Kindergarten - Grade 2	√	√*	√	√*
	TerraNova Second Edition and Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (3)	Grade 2	√	√	√	√
	Maryland School Assessment – Reading (4)	Grades 3, 5 and 8	√	√	√	√
	Maryland School Assessment – Math (4)	Grades 3, 5 and 8	√	√	√	√
Grades 9-12	Algebra I or Higher (5)	Grade 9	√	√	√	√
	Geometry or Higher (5)	Grade 10	√	√	√	√
	Algebra High School Assessment (6)	All test takers; Class of 2009	√	√	√	√
	English II High School Assessment (6)	All test takers; Class of 2009	√	√	√	√
	Biology High School Assessment (6)	All test takers; Class of 2009	√	√	√	√
	Government High School Assessment (6)	All test takers; Class of 2009	√	√	√	√

**Exhibit 3-1: List of Selected Measures to
Assess the Dimensions of the Achievement Gap in MCPS, Continued**

Grade-Levels	Measures of Student Performance by Category (15)	Cohort or Data Points	Measures of Achievement Gaps by Race and Ethnicity		Measures of Achievement Gaps by Service Group	
			Current	Trends	Current	Trends
Non-Standardized Grade-Level Measures						
Grades K-5	Suspensions (7)	All students	√	√	√	√
Grades 6-12	Suspensions (7)	All students	√	√	√	√
Grades 9-12	Graduation Rates (8)	Seniors	√	√	√	√
	Dropout Rates (8)	9th – 12th graders	√	√	√	√
Above Grade-Level Measures						
Grades 5-8	Advanced Math in Grade 5 (9)	Grade 5	√	n/a	√	n/a
	Advanced Math in Grade 6 (10)	Grade 6	√	√	√	√
	Algebra I or Higher (5)	Grade 8	√	√	√	√
Grades 9-12	Geometry or Higher (5)	Grade 9	√	√	√	√
	Advanced Placement Participation and Scores of 3 or Higher (11)	Graduates	√	√	√	√
	PSAT Participation and Writing Scores with AP/honors Potential (12)	Grades 9 & 10	√	√	√	√
	SAT Scores and Participation (13)	Seniors	√	√	√	√
Disability and Gifted Identification Measures						
All Grades	Disability Prevalence and LRE A Placement (14)	Ages 3-21	√	√	n/a	n/a
Grade 2	Gifted Identification (15)	Grade 2	√	√	√	√
* Trend data unavailable for Grade 2 Spring Reading Benchmarks						

Chapter VI: Summary of Findings

The "achievement gap" refers to disparities in educational performance among different student groups. National achievement gap studies typically report differences between high-performing student groups (e.g., Whites, Asians, and high-income students) and low-performing student groups (e.g., Blacks, Latinos, and low-income students). Some achievement gap studies also compare differences by students' disability status and English language proficiency.

This Office of Legislative Oversight report tracks differences between high- and low-performing MCPS students by race, ethnicity, and service group membership [i.e., special education, limited English proficiency (LEP), and receipt of free and reduced price meals (FARMs)].

Federal and state legislation enacted in 2002 requires school districts to close the achievement gap on standardized reading and mathematics tests by the 2013-2014 school year. In recent years, the Council's budget worksessions with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) have included discussion of funding requests aimed at narrowing the achievement gap in MCPS.

The achievement gaps experienced by MCPS are a local reflection of a national challenge. Both the achievement gap by race and ethnicity, and the gap between low-income and affluent students are long-standing, national challenges. These gaps show up on almost every measure of student performance ranging from drop-out rates to enrollment in college prep courses, to rates of being identified as disabled or gifted, to obtaining college degrees.

The achievement gap has narrowed for some age groups over the last 30 years; however, the point spread remains large. For example, student performance data reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows, on average, a Black senior in high school demonstrates the same math proficiency as a White 8th grader.[1]

Closing the achievement gap reflects a belief among policymakers that all children can reach proficiency and, with enough effort, public schools can close the gaps. School systems across the country face challenges in their efforts to close the achievement gap. At minimum, these challenges include how to:

- Close the achievement gap without limiting what top students learn;
- Close the gap without setting the bar so low that everyone can pass it;
- Close the achievement gap without pushing out students most at risk of failure;
- Reflect on and address the role of schools in contributing to the achievement gap; and
- Address culturally sensitive issues without reinforcing stereotypes that some students can learn while others cannot.

The County Council requested the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) compile this report on the achievement gap in order to:

- Further the Council's understanding of the achievement gap in MCPS; and
- Enhance the Council's review and oversight of future MCPS budget requests targeted at closing the achievement gap.

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[1] NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress, National Center for Education Statistics

Specifically, the Council asked OLO to prepare a report that:

- Explains the different ways the term "achievement gap" is defined and used;
- Describes federal and state laws that include mandates related to closing the achievement gap; and
- Summarizes student performance data that documents the magnitude and nature of the achievement gap in Montgomery County Public Schools.

OLO worked with MCPS staff to develop a dataset of 43 measures of student performance among 15 categories that would reflect the current magnitude of the MCPS achievement gap. This report tracks trend data available on 37 of these measures to describe MCPS' progress in closing the achievement gap over time. Measures of MCPS' progress in narrowing the gap are based on comparisons of cohorts of students over time (e.g., 3rd graders in 2003 compared to 3rd graders in 2007) rather than longitudinal data that describes the progress of the same set of students overtime (e.g., 3rd graders in 2003 compared to 7th graders in 2007). Federal and state requirements for tracking school system progress in narrowing the achievement gap are also based on cohort comparisons.

This chapter summarizes OLO's findings into three parts:

Part A, Legal and Policy Framework presents findings about the laws and policies that influence MCPS' efforts to close the achievement gap;

Part B, Magnitude of the MCPS Achievement Gap summarizes findings on the disparities that the most recent data show exists by race, ethnicity, and service group status on several measures of student performance; and

Part C, Progress in Closing the MCPS Achievement Gap summarizes findings on the progress MCPS has made in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status; depending on data availability, the trends identified are based on three- to seven-years of student performance data.

A. Legal and Policy Framework

Finding 1:   Federal and state laws codify requirements for closing the achievement gap.

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, enacted in January 2002, establishes closing the achievement gap as an explicit objective. It calls for closing the gaps "between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers."[2]

NCLB requires school districts across the country to close the achievement gap by ensuring that all students demonstrate proficiency in state reading and mathematics standards by the end of the 2013-14 school year. These requirements also apply to students with disabilities and English language learners.

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[2] Section 1001(3) of Title I of NCLB.

The Bridge to Excellence Act of 2002 codifies the federal NCLB goals into Maryland law. The legal requirements include that: all subgroups reach common high standards in math and reading; all English language learners become proficient in English; all students are taught by highly qualified teachers in safe, drug-free environments; and all students graduate from high school.

Bridge to Excellence further requires that each Maryland school district submit a master plan to the State that explains how it will implement the Act. A district must also provide annual updates that describe its progress in achieving the Act's goals and challenges. Finally, beginning with the Class of 2009, Bridge to Excellence requires that all students must pass High School Assessments in English, Algebra, Biology, and Government or alternate state requirements in order to graduate.

Finding 2:   MCPS' goals for closing the achievement gap <u>exceed</u> federal and state mandates.

Federal and State goals for closing the achievement gap focus on eliminating the gap in grade-level expectations for student performance, such as meeting grade-level standards in reading and math. Alternatively, MCPS' strategic plan, *Our Call to Action*, sets goals to narrow the achievement gap in both at grade and above grade-level expectations of student performance.

For example, *Our Call to Action* includes milestones for ensuring that "all students achieve or exceed state proficiency standards in mathematics, reading and writing" and "all schools will increase enrollment and performance of all students in gifted, honors, AP, and other programs." Many of the milestones tracked in the *Annual Report on Our Call to Action* also exceed the federal and state requirements for students to meet grade-level standards. Specific above grade-level measures of performance tracked by subgroup in this annual report include the percent of:

- Grade 5 and 6 students enrolled in Advanced Math;
- Middle school students completing Algebra I;
- Graduates meeting requirements for the University of Maryland System;
- Students enrolled in honors and AP courses; and
- AP test takers earning qualifying scores of three or better.

B. <u>Magnitude of the MCPS Achievement Gap</u>

Finding 3:   The magnitude of MCPS' current achievement gap varies by student performance measure.

OLO's review of 43 measures of student performance, participation, and identification found that the magnitude of the achievement gap varies widely. The measures that demonstrated the smallest disparities in student performance by race, ethnicity, or service subgroups are:

- Percent of student subgroups who reach the Kindergarten Reading Benchmark;
- Percent of student subgroups earning AP scores of three or more among examiners;
- Rates of high school graduation among student subgroups; and
- Rates of PSAT participation among student subgroups.

MCPS' results for the Kindergarten Spring Reading Benchmark are particularly impressive; the data show a negligible achievement gap and demonstrate that more than 80% of every subgroup met this benchmark in 2007. This accomplishment is even more notable when considering the achievement gap in school readiness where low-performing subgroups were 66-77% percent as likely as high-performing subgroups to demonstrate full readiness for school as kindergarteners.

The performance measures that demonstrate the greatest disparities in student performance by subgroup are for students who are suspended and students who drop out. For example, 3% of White students were suspended from secondary school in 2007 compared to 10% of Latino students and 15% of Black students; 1.5% of White students dropped out of high school in 2007 compared to 3.6% of Blacks students and 5.3% of Latino students.

Finding 4:   MCPS' results for the Maryland State Assessments demonstrate smaller achievement gaps for the elementary grades than the secondary grades.

The performance of students on the Maryland State Assessments (MSAs) in Grades 3, 5 and 8 are measures of grade-level performance. Data from the 2007 MSAs demonstrate smaller gaps in MCPS student achievement by race and ethnicity in the elementary versus secondary grades. For example, compared to White students, Black students were: 78% as likely to pass the Grade 3 MSA in reading; 74% as likely to pass the Grade 3 MSA in math; 68% as likely to pass the Grade 8 MSA in reading; and 51% as likely to pass the Grade 8 MSA in math.

Similarly, the 2007 MSAs demonstrate smaller gaps in the elementary grades by service group status than the gaps evident in the secondary grades. More specifically, students in the service subgroups (i.e., students with disabilities, English language learners, and students receiving FARMs) were 56-77% as likely as non-service subgroups to pass the Grade 3 MSAs in either math or reading, but were only 22-46% as likely to pass the Grade 8 MSAs in math or reading.

Finding 5:   The achievement gaps for measures of above-grade performance tend to be larger than the gaps for grade-level performance.

On average, the achievement gaps on measures of above grade-level expectations are wider than the gap evident on grade-level measures. For example, in 2006 and 2007, Whites were more than twice as likely as Blacks and Latinos to:

- Enroll in advanced math courses in Grades 5 and 6;
- Complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 8;
- Complete Geometry by the end of Grade 9; or
- Earn PSAT verbal, math, and reading scores that demonstrate honors/AP potential.

Similarly, all students were more than twice as likely as students in the service subgroups to meet these benchmarks.

The gaps in AP performance are an exception to this pattern. In 2006, among students who completed an AP course, Latino test takers were 93% as likely as White peers to earn a qualifying AP score and Blacks were 68% as likely. Moreover, English language learners taking AP exams were 4% more likely than all MCPS test takers to earn a qualifying AP score in 2007.

Finding 6:   Data on prevalence rates for gifted and disability identification evidence significant gaps by race and ethnicity.

Data from MCPS on prevalence rates for gifted identification by race and ethnicity show that Whites were more than twice as likely as Blacks and Latinos to be identified as gifted based on the Grade 2 Global Assessment. Specifically, in 2007, 50% of White students were identified as gifted compared to 22% of Blacks and Latinos.

Conversely, data from MCPS and the Maryland State Department of Education on prevalence rates for disability identification indicate that Blacks were more than twice as likely as Whites to be identified as having mental retardation or emotional disturbance, and that both Blacks and Latinos were 77-79% more likely than Whites to be identified as having a learning disability. Specifically, in 2006, 0.8% of Blacks were identified as mentally retarded compared to 0.3% of Whites, 1.4% of Blacks were identified as emotionally disturbed compared to 0.7% of Whites, and 6.0-6.1% of Blacks and Latinos were identified as having a learning disability compared to 3.4% of Whites.

C. Progress in Closing the MCPS Achievement Gap

Finding #7 is based on an analysis of MCPS' progress in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status across measures of grade-level performance, above grade-level performance, special education identification and placement, and gifted identification. OLO did not investigate the causes for gaps growing, shrinking, or holding constant overtime, so this level of analysis is not provided.

Comparing percent changes in the absolute achievement gap among these measures over time, Finding #7 reports the bottom line trend results in three categories:

- Measures where MCPS made progress in narrowing the achievement gap;
- Measures where MCPS achieved mixed progress in narrowing the achievement gap; and
- Measures where MCPS lost ground in closing the achievement gap.

Finding 7:   Trend data over a three- to seven-year period show that MCPS made progress in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity and service group status for nine measures, achieved mixed progress for seven measures, and lost ground for four measures.

The following three tables summarize the results of this trend analysis. Part A lists the measures where MCPS made progress in narrowing the achievement gap; Part B lists the measures where MCPS achieved mixed progress in narrowing the achievement gap; and Part C lists the measures where MCPS lost ground in closing the achievement gap.

To standardize comparisons of progress across measures, each table tracks the percent change in the absolute achievement gap over time (e.g., the 2007 gap – 2002 gap/2002 gap) by measure rather than absolute changes over time (e.g., the 2007 gap – 2002 gap). Detailed data by measure regarding absolute changes over time are available in Chapter V and in Appendix Q.

Part A: Measures where MCPS made progress in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status	
Reading Benchmarks in Kindergarten and Grade 1	From 2002 to 2007, MCPS narrowed performance gaps in Kindergarten and Grade 1 Reading Benchmarks. More specifically, MCPS: • Narrowed the Kindergarten reading gap by 53-60% by race and ethnicity, by 21% by special education status, by 21% by LEP status, and by 84% by FARMs status. • Narrowed the Grade 1 reading gap by 38-48% by race and ethnicity and by 35-38% by service group status.
TerraNova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in Grade 2	From 2001 to 2005, MCPS narrowed the gap among students who exceeded the 50th percentile on the CTBS Battery Index. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed the CTBS gap 25-32% by the race and ethnicity gap and by 12-30% by service group status.
Maryland School Assessments (MSAs) in Grades 3, 5 and 8	From 2003 to 2007, MCPS narrowed gaps in performance across the Grade 3, 5 and 8 MSAs. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed the Grade 3 MSA gaps by 42-63% by race and ethnicity, and by 8-63% by service group; • Narrowed the Grade 5 MSA gaps by 30-33% by race and ethnicity, and by 21-38% by service group; and • Narrowed the Grade 8 MSA gaps by 10-17% by race and ethnicity, and by 4-15% by service group.
High School Assessments (HSAs)	From 2002 and 2007, MCPS narrowed the gap among all test takers on the HSAs. More specifically, MCPS: • Narrowed the Algebra HSA gap by 13-36% by race and ethnicity, and by 10-43% by service group status; • Narrowed the Government HSA gap by 29-47% by race and ethnicity, and by 25-39% by service group status; and • Narrowed the English II HSA gap by 13-16% by race and ethnicity, and by 10-16% by service group status. From 2005 to 2007, among all test takers, MCPS also narrowed: • The Biology HSA gap by 0-21% by race and ethnicity, and by 10-28% by service group status.

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Part A: Measures where MCPS made progress in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status, Continued	
PSAT and SAT participation	From 2003 to 2007, MCPS: • Reduced the PSAT participation gap 34-44% by race and ethnicity, and 33-34% by service group status. From 2001 and 2005, MCPS also: • Reduced the SAT participation gap by 12-25% by race and ethnicity, and by 9-13% by service group status.
Qualifying Advanced Placement (AP) Scores of 3 or Higher	Between the Classes of 2002 and 2006, MCPS narrowed the gap among AP exam takers who earned one or more qualifying scores. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed the AP performance gap by race and ethnicity gap by 7-44%, and by 19-40% by special education and FARMs status; and • Reversed the AP performance gap by LEP status so that LEP examiners became more likely than all MCPS students to earn a qualifying AP score.
Algebra I completion by the end of Grade 9	From 2001 to 2006, MCPS narrowed the gap in Algebra I completion rates by the end of Grade 9. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed the Grade 9 Algebra I gap by 11-14% by race and ethnicity, and by 7-15% by service group status.
Geometry completion by the end of Grade 10	From 2004 and 2006, MCPS narrowed the gap in Geometry completion rates by the end of Grade 10. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed the Grade 10 Geometry gap by 6-7% by race and ethnicity, and by 4-11% by LEP and FARMs status.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) A Placements	From 2003 to 2006, MCPS narrowed the gap in the percent of students with disabilities served in LRE A placements. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed the gap in LRE A placements by 12% between Black and White students and by 45% between Latino and White students.

Part B: Measures where MCPS achieved mixed progress in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status	
School Readiness	From 2003 to 2007, Montgomery County, inclusive of MCPS, achieved mixed results in narrowing the gap among kindergarteners assessed as fully ready for school by their teachers. In particular, the school readiness gap: • Narrowed by 40% by disability status, and by 10% by LEP status; and • Increased by 13-29% by race and ethnicity, and by 15% by FARMs status.
Algebra I completion by the end of Grade 8	From 2001 and 2006, MCPS achieved mixed progress in narrowing the gap in Algebra I completion rates by the end of Grade 8. In particular, MCPS: • Narrowed by 3% the White-Latino gap in completion of Algebra I by the end of Grade 8; and • Widened by 13% the White-Black gap and by 8-13% the gaps by special education and LEP status in Algebra I completion by the end of Grade 8.
PSAT performance	From 2003 to 2007, MCPS achieved mixed progress in narrowing the gap among students who earned PSAT scores that demonstrated honors/AP potential. In particular, MCPS narrowed: • The PSAT verbal score gap between Whites and Latinos by 9% and by 5-11% by service group status, but widened the White-Black gap by 9%; • The PSAT math score gap by 5-7% by race and ethnicity and by 1-17% by service group status; and • The PSAT writing score gap by 2-8% by service group status, but widened the gap by race and ethnicity by 3-5%.
AP participation among graduates	Between the Classes of 2002 and 2005, MCPS achieved mixed progress in closing the gap in AP course participation rates. More specifically, MCPS: • Reduced the White-Latino gap in AP participation by 19%, and the gaps associated with LEP and FARMs status by 8-10%; and • Increased the White-Black AP participation gap by 5%, and the gap associated with disability status by 13%.
Gifted Identification	From 2004 to 2007, MCPS made mixed progress in narrowing the gap among 2nd graders identified as gifted. In particular, MCPS: • Diminished the gifted identification gap by 14% between Whites and Blacks; and • Widened the gifted identification gap by 1% between all students and students receiving FARMs and between all students and English language learners, by 3% between Whites and Latinos, and by 14% between all students and students with disabilities.

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Part B: Measures where MCPS achieved mixed progress in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status, Continued	
Graduation rates	In recent years, MCPS has achieved mixed progress in narrowing the gap in graduation rates among seniors. More specifically, MCPS: • Narrowed the gap in graduation rates by special education and FARMs status by 60-70% from 2003 to 2007; and • Widened the White-Black gap in graduation rates by 54% and the White-Latino gap by 85% from 2002 to 2007.
Dropout rates	In recent years, MCPS has also achieved mixed progress in narrowing the gap in dropout rates among high school students. More specifically, MCPS: • Narrowed the gap in dropout rates by special education status by 100% from 2003 to 2007 by widened the gap by FARMs status by 179%; and • Widened the White-Black gap in dropout rates by 105% and the White-Latino gap by 122% from 2002 to 2007.

Part C: Measures where MCPS lost ground in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status	
Advanced Math Course Enrollment in Grade 6	From 2001 to 2006, MCPS lost ground in narrowing the gap among 6th graders enrolled in advanced math courses. More specifically, MCPS: • Increased the gap in advanced math enrollment in Grade 6 by 15-19% by race and ethnicity, and by 10-22% by service group status.
SAT performance	From 2001 to 2005, MCPS lost ground in narrowing the gap among seniors earning combined SAT verbal and math scores of 1,100 or above. In particular, MCPS: • Increased the White-Black gap in SAT performance by 4% and the White-Latino gap by 13%, and • Increased the SAT performance gaps between all students and the service subgroups by 2-15%.

Part C: Measures where MCPS lost ground in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and service group status, Continued	
Special education identification	From 2003 to 2006, MCPS lost ground in reducing the gaps in any disability, learning disability, emotional disturbance and mental retardation classifications by race and ethnicity. In particular, MCPS: • Widened the gap in identification rates between Whites and Blacks for any disabilities by 58%, for learning disabilities by 31%, for emotional disturbance by 74%, and for mental retardation by 14%; and • Widened the gap in identification rates between Whites and Latinos for learning disabilities by 44%, for mental retardation by 24%, and for any disabilities by more than 1000% as a result of Latinos becoming more likely than their White peers to be classified as having any disability during this time frame.
Student suspensions	From 2000 to 2007, MCPS lost ground in narrowing the gaps in elementary and secondary suspension rates. In particular, MCPS: • Widened the gaps in elementary suspension rates by 28% between White and Black students, by 700% between White and Latino students, by 110% between all students and students with disabilities, and by 33% between all students and English language learners and between all students and students receiving FARMs. • Widened the gaps in secondary suspension rates by 72-78% by race and ethnicity, by 13% by special education status, by 70% by FARMs status, and by 1400% by LEP status due to English language learners transitioning from being less to becoming more likely than all students to be suspended during this time frame.

Using an analysis of trend data across the same measures of performance reviewed for Finding #7, Findings #8-9 report where MCPS achieved the greatest progress at improving the performance of low-performing subgroups relative to high-performing subgroups in two areas:

• The subgroup where MCPS achieved the greatest progress in narrowing the gap by race and ethnicity; and
• The subgroup where MCPS achieved the greatest progress in narrowing the gap by service group status.

OLO did not investigate the causes for MCPS making greater progress in narrowing the achievement gap among some subgroups versus others, so this level of analysis is not provided.

Finding 8: **In recent years, MCPS made more progress in narrowing the gap between White and Latino students than between White and Black students.**

The review of student performance data by race and ethnicity showed that, relative to the performance of White students, Latino students made greater gains on more measures of student performance than their Black peers. More specifically, MCPS improved the performance of Latino students relative to their White peers by 20% of more for the following 12 measures:

- Grade 5 Math MSA scores,
- Grade 8 Math MSA scores,
- Grade 3 Reading MSA scores,
- TerraNova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills,
- Government HSA scores,
- AP participation rates among graduates,
- Algebra I completion by the end of Grade 8,
- Algebra HSA scores,
- Kindergarten Reading Benchmarks,
- LRE A Placements,
- Grade 3 Math MSA scores, and
- Grade 5 Reading MSA scores.

Comparatively, MCPS improved the performance of Black students relative to White students by 20% or more for six of the 12 measures listed above. For example, the performance of Latino students relative to White students on Algebra HSA improved by 37% (19 points) from 2002 to 2007. As a result, the likelihood of Latino students demonstrating the same proficiency as White students on this HSA increased from 52% to 71%. Comparatively, the performance of Black students relative to their White peers on this HSA improved by 18% (10 points), increasing the likelihood that Black students would perform the same as White students from 55% to 65%.

The exception to this pattern of MCPS achieving greater progress among Latino students than Black students relative to their White peers occurs in rates of dropout and learning disability. Compared to White students, Latino students became 41% more likely to be identified as having a learning disability between 2003 and 2006 compared to Black students who became 34% more likely during this time frame. Latino students also became 47% more likely than their White peers to drop out of high school from 2002 to 2007 compared to Black students who became 39% more likely during this time frame.

Finding 9: **In recent years, MCPS made more progress in narrowing the achievement gap associated with English language proficiency, compared to the achievement gaps associated with special education and receipt of FARMs.**

The review of service group status data by subgroup showed that MCPS made the most progress in narrowing the performance gap between English language learners and all students/English proficient students. This was followed closely by progress made in narrowing the performance gap between students receiving FARMs compared to all students/students not receiving FARMs; and finally by progress made in narrowing the achievement gap between students with disabilities compared to all students/students not receiving special education services.

More specifically, MCPS improved the performance of English language learners relative to all students/English proficient students by 20% or more for 13 measures:

- Grade 3 Reading MSA scores,
- Grade 5 Math MSA scores,
- TerraNova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills,
- Government HSA scores,
- AP participation rates among graduates,
- Kindergarten Reading Benchmarks;
- Algebra HSA scores,
- Grade 5 Reading MSA scores,
- Grade 8 Reading MSA scores,
- Biology HSA,
- Grade 1 Reading Benchmarks,
- Grade 3 Math MSA scores, and
- Geometry Completion by the end of Grade 9.

In comparison, MCPS improved the performance of students with disabilities relative to all students/students *without disabilities* by 20% or more for ten measures that include six of the measures listed above.

MCPS also improved the performance of students receiving FARMs relative to their peers by 20% of more for 13 measures than include ten of the measures listed above. Yet, the range of growth that MCPS achieved among English language learners relative to their peers for these measures at 21-193% was higher than the range of growth that MCPS achieved among students receiving FARMs relative to their peers at 23-61% for 13 measures.

For example, the performance of English language learners relative to English proficient students on the Grade 3 Reading MSA improved by 193% (51 points) from 2003 to 2007. As a result, the likelihood of English language learners demonstrating the same performance (i.e., proficiency) as English proficient students on this MSA increased from 26% to 77%. Comparatively, the performance of students receiving FARMs relative to their peers improved by 61% (29 points) on this assessment, increasing the likelihood that students receiving FARMs would perform the same as students not receiving FARMs on the Grade 3 Reading MSA from 48% to 77% between 2003 and 2007.